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CONFERENCE *connection*

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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

June 15, 2020



Watch a video invitation to this Saturday's worship from Rev. Dr. Brice Thomas.

Special Event: Conference Unity Worship

Join us at 11am Eastern or 10am Central for our **Conference Unity Worship Event: Being the Church in a Pandemic World** on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/SECUCC/live/>). You do not have to have Facebook to watch, just click the link to watch. We are excited to have people from all across the Conference leading us in our worship and hope you will join us!



Southeast Conference Board of Directors Statement Against Racial Hatred and Violence

As representatives of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, we officially and unequivocally condemn all racial hatred and racial violence, specifically its manifestation in the recent spate of racially charged police killings around the nation, including that of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Black trans man Tony McDade. We also condemn the troubling number of White vigilante killings becoming so common here in the Southeast under “Stand Your Ground” laws, such as the recent murder of Ahmaud Arbery. We stand in full solidarity with communities of color in the face of such violence.

We are fundamentally opposed to systemic racism and inequity at every level of our society. We affirm the testimony of Scripture which makes clear that all people are created in the likeness and image of God. We further insist that racial hatred is inconsistent with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and that we are called to stand and speak boldly against all hate, bias and brutality as members of the Body of Christ. We condemn not only the heinous killings of late, but also the contemporary and historical animus that drives this evil. We acknowledge the history of racial terror, hatred, criminalization, and commodification of Black and Brown bodies (in particular) in our nation, which undergirds this current systemic violence. We stand vehemently opposed to these affronts against human equality.

Relieved and encouraged that the officers involved in Floyd’s killing have been charged with crimes, we desire to see continued accountability for all

officers of the law who would so egregiously abuse the power and responsibility of their positions.

Despite the growing din of voices propagating the lies of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, White supremacy, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia here in the United States and abroad, we commit to the biblical truths that all people are loved and precious in God's sight and that Christ has broken down the dividing walls of separation between us. In Christ's name, we are committed to speaking and acting with boldness for justice for all, as champions of God's Beloved Community here in the American Southeast.

Southeast Conference Board of Directors: Rev. J.R Finney (Moderator), Heith Battles, Rev. Jennifer Crane Crenshaw, Rev. Ginnie Ferrell, Rev. James Bowman Harris, Penny Hensley, Holly Kendal, Rev. Bennie Liggins, Hannah Mays, Rev. Ann Michelle Rogers-Brigham, Juanita Simmons, Rev. Raymonda Speller, Gavin Warren, Ugena Whitlock

News from the Conference Office

Resources about Racism on Our Website

We have collated a list of suggested resources for individuals and churches as we learn more about how systemic racism is part of our lives. More on our website at <https://www.secucc.org/racism>.

Southeast Conference Annual Meeting - September 26, 2020

Because of the concern about COVID-19, the Board of Directors has decided to move the September Annual Meeting to a virtual event. Hold the date! More details to follow!

For All Clergy

- **An Hour of Conversations and Prayer**

Tuesdays in June (16, 23, 30) - 11:00 a.m. Eastern (10:00 a.m. Central)
This week will provide an opportunity to reflect on the past week: acts of racism and acts of violence. How do we process the emotions, how do we assist people in our congregations, what should we as the SEC Conference be doing?

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/479440102>

- **Live Harp Meditations for Ministers**

Thursday, June 23: 1:00 p.m. Eastern (12:00 Central)

20 minutes of meditation with Celtic harp. Silent prayer and reflection following if desired, facilitated by Rev. Jean Norton. (For questions or to sign up for individual Therapeutic Harp Sessions, contact Jean at HeartSongJean@gmail.com.)

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/96976838422>

- **Especially for Specialized Ministers**

Tuesday, June 25: 9:30 a.m. Eastern (8:30 a.m. Central)

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/354744689>



Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2020. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of June 21

- Midway Congregational UCC; Midway, Georgia
- Dorinda Broadnax
- Brenda Green
- Dorothy Owen
- Brice Thomas

Week of June 28

- Evergreen Congregational UCC; Beachton, Georgia
- Leslie Brogan
- Sam Greening
- Shannon Michael Pater
- John Pearson
- Merianna Neely

Churches in Transition

Central Congregational, Atlanta, GA; First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Open Table, Mobile AL; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA

COVID-19 Special Section

Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation Continues for all Church Leaders

As situations regarding COVID-19 keep changing, moderators and church leaders are invited to join in the continued conversation about when and how church buildings re-open and in-person worship resumes. Everyone is welcome to join the conversation. Dr. Boghuma Titanji will again join us for the beginning of the conversation.

Join us on **Monday, June 15 at 7:00 pm Eastern / 6:00 pm Central** via Zoom. [Register online here](#).

Looking ahead – mark your calendar for another conversation on Monday, June 29. COVID-19 Resources, including a [suggested Phase-in plan](#) can be located on the Conference website, under [COVID-19 resources](#).



Protest During a Pandemic

From Atlanta to Minneapolis

Lessons from the Struggle for Justice

A Free Webinar



Protest During a Pandemic - Lessons from the Struggle for Justice

Instead of becoming suppressed by the pandemic, the spirit of justice has arisen with fierce determination and become embodied in countless ways.

Join our own Rev. Michael Malcom of Alabama Interfaith Power & Light and the People's Justice Council and Rev. Dr. Brooks Berndt of the United Church of Christ Environmental Justice Ministry on Jun 24, 2020 at 1:00 PM (Noon Central) for a free webinar.

This webinar will reflect upon how protest has manifested itself during this time and the lessons that can be learned for communities of faith dedicated to answering the unrelenting call of justice. The three featured panelists will be:

- Sophia Benrud, the environmental justice organizer for Black Visions Collective, which has been a leading force for justice in Minneapolis
- Lindsay Harper, the national coordinator for Arm-in-Arm which centers economic and racial justice in addressing the climate crisis
- Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick, a researcher identifying the numerous ways nonviolent actions have become manifest during the pandemic

Sign-up now to join the webinar! Even if you can't make its scheduled time, still sign-up, and they will send you a recording of it. [Register today.](#)

Pandemic grants for churches added to UCC National

Setting COVID-19 relief response

The United Church of Christ National Setting is offering financial assistance to local churches whose ministries have been challenged by the novel coronavirus pandemic. As one, the national officers have collectively identified \$2.6 million in COVID-19 relief, \$1.5 million in loans that will be [administered through the Cornerstone Fund](#) and another \$1.1 million in micro-grants. **The grant application process opens June 1.** Grant money will be available through the [process detailed on the UCC website](#).

We want to highlight one type of grant provided through UCC Disaster Ministries and is disbursed through the Southeast Conference. It is called UCC COVID-19 Conference Recovery Grant. This is specifically designed to meet the needs created or worsened due to COVID-19 in communities hardest hit by the pandemic. The grants aid churches in their efforts to provide assistance to individuals and families (not churches themselves). The Conference actually needs to apply for the funds from Disaster Ministries. So please let me know if your church could benefit by such a grant so that the Conference can make an application.

UCC Cornerstone Fund Pandemic Relief Loan

The United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund Pandemic Relief Loan program is available to churches in participating Conferences, including the Southeast Conference. While loan amounts and terms can vary by Conference, the Southeast Conference program is offering a limited number of 12-month, interest-only loans of up to \$5,000 at a rate of 2.50%. Loan applications are required and are due by July 15, 2020. Visit cornerstonefund.org/sec to download the loan application.

News from the Wider Church

**PANDEMICS
PROTEST &
PRAISE**

**REGISTER TODAY!
BIT.LY/PPPSERIES**

VIRGINIA
HIGHLAND
church

**TUESDAYS @ 7PM EST
BEGINNING JUNE 16**

**A SUMMER JUSTICE SERIES
FROM VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND CHURCH, FEATURING:**

Rev. Billy Michael Honor
New Georgia Project

Rev. Dr. Teresa Smallwood
Vanderbilt Divinity

Mary Hooks
Southerners on New Ground

Dante Hudson, Esq.
Public Defender

Rev. Renetta Hobson
Therapist

Pandemics, Protest and Praise Begins Tuesday

Hosted by Virginia-Highland Church, Atlanta

What do racism, voter suppression, COVID-19, police violence, queer and transphobia, and racial trauma all have in common? They are viruses infecting our country and afflicting Black and Brown folk in our community, and they need to be fully treated. We're talking about it all during our new summer justice series, "Pandemics, Protest, & Praise!" beginning **Tuesday, June 16th at 7:00pm EST** for engaging conversation with faith and justice leaders about our current state of affairs. [Click for more information.](#)

Energy Democracy Zoom Meeting is June 23

COVID has highlighted a huge disparity of environmental and economic justice in the South. Congregations are suffering because of the inability to gather for worship service however utilities are still requiring pay for their service. Those in our congregations are not able to provide goods and services for their living yet utilities are requiring payment for their service for you to live. This is inequitable and egregious. We are limited in our choices for energy sources; pay disproportionate energy rates; and, are dying from the pollution. We as people of faith are called to fight for a just society. We want to invite you to envision a ministry where we had more resources for ministry because our congregation has control of their own energy. We invite you to demand that our leadership places people and planet over profit. We invite you to fight for the least of these. Mark your

calendar now for June 23 at 7 pm EA/6 pm and plan to join Rev. Michael Malcom. [Click here to register.](#)

UCC Juneteenth 2020 . . . And Still We Rise

Juneteenth marks the official end of slavery in the U.S. June 19, 1865, and the recognition of African-American history and heritage. Join the United Church of Christ for moments of remembrance, education, celebration, and calls to action.

In this moment we are witnessing public lynchings and state-sanctioned violence against black bodies. Together we must stop the murders of African descendant people! Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd are the latest victims of state-sanctioned militarism, and white racists invoking the "Stand Your Ground" law in order to justify lethal gun violence against African Americans.

The United Church of Christ invites you to register and join the live webinar, Juneteenth 2020: And Still We Rise, **Friday, June 19, 2020 at 12 noon until 1:30 pm EDT.** [Register online here](#) and [download the program here](#).

News from our Local Congregations



Kirkwood UCC Hosts Virtual VBS

Even a pandemic could not stop Kirkwood UCC in Atlanta from hosting their annual Vacation Bible School. Instead of meeting in person they just did it virtually! As Kathy Carter, the church's Children's Minister said, "During this time of CoVid 19 and the need for social distancing we just weren't quite sure what to do about VBS. Do we cancel it? Do we postpone it to later in the summer? Neither of these options seemed like the best answer. After a few brainstorming sessions, we decided to hold a Virtual VBS." [Read more and view a photo album on our website.](#)

Atlanta church consults its doctors about returning to in-person worship

Doctors and scientists who belong to [Virginia-Highland Church](#) in Atlanta are "not in a hurry to return to in-person worship" and have recommended masks and other coronavirus precautions when the congregation eventually reopens its building – including changes in seating, music, childcare, the offering, Communion, cleaning and more.

Like most United Church of Christ congregations, Virginia-Highland has responded to the pandemic by holding worship and all other activities online since March. In May, the Rev. Matt Laney, its senior pastor, convened a 10-member "Re-Opening Task Force" to discuss possible guidelines.

[Read more on the UCC website.](#)



Teaching how to "protest with a purpose."

Atlanta TV Station WAGA FOX5 Highlights Atlanta UCC Pastor

Pastor Derrick Rice is no stranger to peaceful acts of civil disobedience and said one of the many lessons from the days and nights of unrest in Atlanta and across the country should be clear. "There's a difference between an uprising and a riot," said Rev. Rice.

Pastor Rice leads Sankofa United Church of Christ in southwest Atlanta. Over the weekend, he was among many community activists who canceled their planned protests and teamed up with dozens of black men at the Target on Camp Creek Parkway. Their mission--to discourage the young people who responded to a social media invitation to meet at target, loot the store, then burn it down. [Read the rest of the article and watch the video here.](#)

Training and Learning Opportunities

Webinar Resources from UCC Justice and Local Church Ministries (JLCM)

On April 5, 2020 - JLCM launched a new webinar platform in service to the entire church. Past webinars can be found on the United Church of Christ youtube channel - playlists. Many congregational leaders send the topical webinars to their leadership team to watch first, then discuss.

Tuesdays for Nurture is a webinar focusing on education, from faith-filled politics, to interviews of key leaders, to "how to's" in congregational life, to the impacts of current realities on the life of the church. Each webinar includes clear suggestions on what YOU can do to change the church, and the world, towards the world God imagines for us.

Thursdays for the Soul focuses on caring for the whole church: the spirituality and care of people.

Upcoming topics are posted on the UCC website under events or on the UCC Facebook page and events. [Tuesday June 16th: Creating Space for Innovation.](#) [Thursday, June 18th: Caring for Black Souls During and Post Trauma](#) as led by Rev. Dr. Aaron Wade.

Mediation Skills, Conflict Transformation, and more

Please join the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center for one of the many events that they have planned from July through December of this year, including traditional events that we haven't presented for a while, as well as brand new webinars on timely topics. A sampling of a few imminent events is listed below (some events will be repeated in future months).

- ***Meditation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders (August 3-7, 2020)***: This intensive 5-day event helps clergy and other church leaders deal more effectively with interpersonal, congregational, and other forms of group conflict.
- ***Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches (July 18)***: Sessions include "Finding Renewal in Conflict" and "How to be Effective when People are Angry," among others. Groups are especially encouraged to register for this event!
- ***Healthy Congregations (July 21)***: Participants will learn how to keep anxiety within their congregations from becoming infectious, put limits on invasive behavior, manage reactivity, focus on strengths, and more! This workshop is also especially well suited for groups who are members of the same congregation.
- ***Breaking Free: Finding Resilience in an Era of Collective Trauma (July 16 and July 30)***: Grounded in Family Systems Theory, and offered in the context of COVID-19 and the aftermath of George Floyd's tragic death, *Breaking Free* will help participants identify the impact of trauma on themselves and others, discuss strategies to break free from trauma, and find resilience.

Further details and registration information for these events and others will be made available on [BrownPaperTickets](#) (some events still pending). Visit <https://lmpeacecenter.org/> for the latest updates or call 630-627-0507, or email Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org.

Conference Calendar

Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation for all Church Leaders

Monday, June 15 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT ([Register online here](#))

Clergy Conversations via Zoom

Tuesday, June 16 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join; NEW LINK](#))

Conference Unity Worship

June 20 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT ([Register online here](#))

Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers

Tuesday, June 25 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT (<https://zoom.us/j/354744689>)

Clergy Conversations via Zoom

Tuesday, June 23 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join; NEW LINK](#))

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers

Thursday, June 25 @ 1:00 pm EDT (<https://zoom.us/j/96976838422>)

Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation for all Church Leaders

Monday, June 29 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT ([Register online here](#))

Clergy Conversations via Zoom

Tuesday, June 30 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT ([Click here to join; NEW LINK](#))

View the **full calendar** of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

Contact Us

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